

# Ankara acceleration accompanies Marmaray opening



**PHASING** Test running is underway on TCDD's latest fast passenger line linking Eskisehir with Gebze. The route forms the centrepiece of a 570 km dedicated passenger corridor between Ankara and Istanbul, but more work remains if journey time and capacity objectives are to be met. Nick Kingsley and Türker Ahi report.

Another year, and another segment of Turkey's grand railway vision is expected to fall into place (RG 4.12 p3), with the ceremonial launch of high speed services between Ankara and Istanbul due in the first quarter. To that end, on December 27 Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan joined newly-appointed transport minister Lütfi Elvan (p00) in the cab of a CAF trainset to travel over the Arifiye – Köseköy section as test running is ramped up.

Linking Turkey's administrative capital with its largest metropolis

is the next railway priority for the Erdoğan administration following the opening of the trans-Bosphorus tunnel on October 29 (RG 12.13 p7). Giving a close-of-year address in Istanbul in late December, TCDD Director-General Süleyman Karaman pledged that work on the line was 'nearing the end', and that 'very soon the residents of Ankara and Istanbul will be able to have breakfast together at the weekend'. But just as integration of the Marmaray tunnel section with the suburban railways at each end is likely to take several more years to complete, so the introduction of Ankara

– Istanbul high speed services is also a play in many scenes.

A significant chunk of the corridor is already operational; much of the 251 km between Ankara and Eskişehir is covered by a 250 km/h dedicated line opened in 2009 (RG 4.09 p8). On the other side of Eskişehir, test running is also underway over a 30 km section of new alignment as far as İnönü, which runs largely parallel to the existing line. From there the high speed line mostly diverges to follow a motorway over the 158 km to Köseköy. Being built by a consortium of Cengiz, CMC, IC Ictaş and China

High speed services have operated between Ankara and Eskişehir since 2009; this month, more sections of dedicated line are expected to open to carry these trains towards Istanbul.

## Steady progress on the new silk road

**EURASIA:** On the back of outgoing Turkish Transport Minister Binali Yıldırım's announcement that the 826 km Kars – Baku – Tbilisi corridor linking Turkey with Georgia and Azerbaijan would be inaugurated this year (RG 1.14 p24), his counterparts in the two neighbouring countries have also offered updates on their progress.

On December 10, Azerbaijan Railways confirmed that it had completed the modernisation of the 317 km east-west corridor linking Baku with the Georgian border at Boyuk Kesik. The work was funded under the 2010-14 State Programme for Railway Development, supported by a US\$215m grant from the Czech Exim Bank, and lead contractor was JSC Demiryolservis.

Azerbaijan's state oil fund is also providing a US\$775m contribution to support the upgrading

of the KTB corridor through Georgia. On December 11, Georgian Energy Minister — and recently-retired international footballer — Kakhi Kaladze rejected reports that work on the project had been suspended, insisting that 'initially there were some problems, but now the railway construction continues normally, and it will be completed in the near future'. But at a tripartite meeting held in Tbilisi on January 8 chaired by Deputy Prime Minister George Kvirikashvili, it was reported that just 31% of the 180 km between Marabda, south of Tbilisi, and the Turkish frontier at Kartsakhi had been completed. The project includes 27 km of new alignment and the rehabilitation of the existing Marabda – Akhalkalaki line.

When the project was launched in November

2007, it was hoped the cross-border line from Turkey would be open by the end of 2010 (RG 1.08 p00). But in August last year, Gurban Nasirov, Deputy Director of Azerbaijan Railways, acknowledged that a range of 'technical and administrative' issues had delayed progress, with the tunnelling work through mountainous northeastern Turkey to meet the existing line near Akhalkalaki proving especially challenging. A new transshipment terminal and logistics zone is being developed south of the town, with tracks for both standard gauge and 1520 mm gauge vehicles.

The three countries hope that, once fully operational, the BTK corridor will carry up to 17 million tonnes of freight and 1 million passengers per annum. ☞

Railway Construction Corp, this portion is also designed for 250 km/h operation as it forges through mountainous terrain in 40 bored tunnels totalling 39 km and across 32 viaducts covering 10.3 km. However, the civil works have encountered delays and the target opening in 2010 proved too ambitious; insiders remain unsure how much of this section will in practice open this year.

Plans to extend the high speed line by a further 56 km from Köseköy to Gebze are in abeyance, so long-distance trains will rejoin the existing line which is being upgraded at a cost of €147m by a Salini Impreglio-led consortium. Track, subgrade, electro-mechanical systems and train control equipment are all being renewed to permit passenger trains to operate at up to 200 km/h from June. From Gebze westwards, high speed services will be required to share the Marmaray corridor with local trains on a three-track alignment (RG 5.13 p72).

### Unanswered questions

Much work remains to be done before the much-vaunted 3 h journey time between the two cities can be realised, with some observers sceptical that any meaningful high speed service will be launched before mid-2015. Significant bottlenecks remain around the larger stations on the corridor: at the western end, the ongoing upgrading of the Marmaray route will prevent inter-city trains from reaching Istanbul itself until at least the middle of next year. Even then, it seems unlikely that high speed trains will grace the iconic Haydarpaşa terminus. Karaman suggested in his address that 'looking forward', high speed services could share the Bosphorus tunnel,

through which provision of 42 daily freight paths is also envisaged.

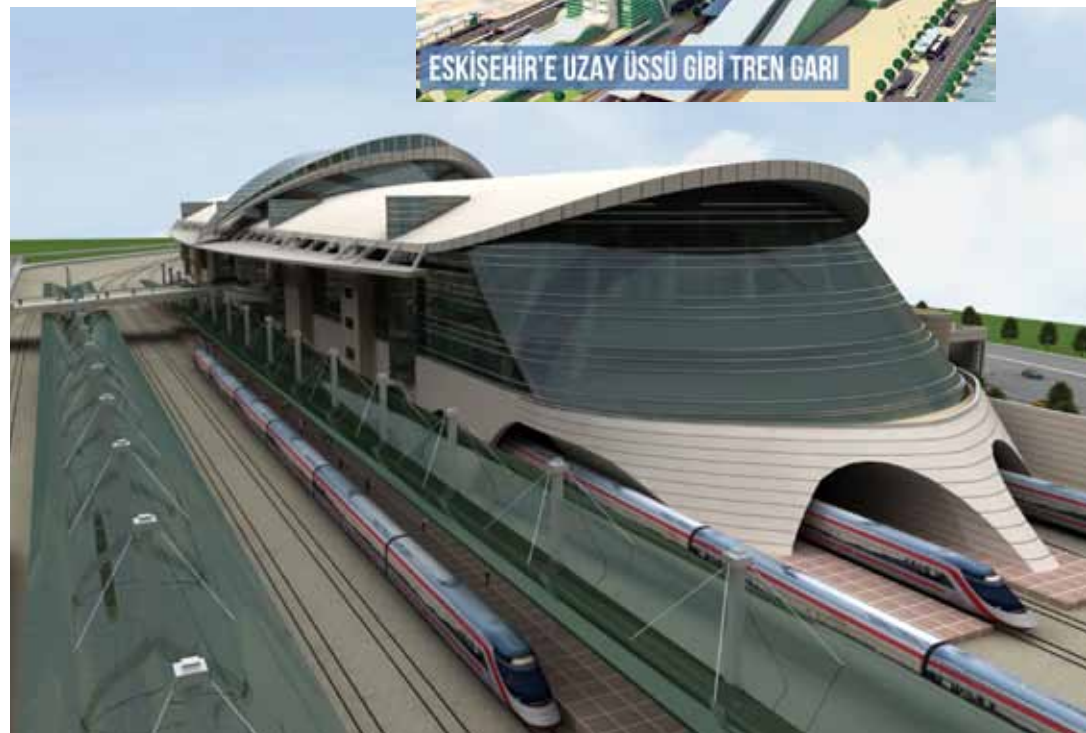
A more likely scenario is that long-distance trains would reach European Turkey by way of the Third Bosphorus Bridge, construction of which was launched at the end of May last year. Although primarily designed to carry the eight-lane Northern Marmara Highway, the Yavuz Sultan Selim crossing would also be shared by a double-track rail corridor intended to link Izmit with Edirne, close to the border with Bulgaria. According to bridge contractor IC İtaş-Astaldi, the railway would 'integrate' with the Marmaray corridor and Istanbul's metro network, whilst also providing a link between the city's two existing airports and a planned aviation hub

to be located 35 km north of Istanbul between Yeniköy and Akpınar.

### Station developments

Meanwhile, major remodelling schemes are underway in both Ankara and Eskişehir, where a cut-and-cover trench is being excavated through the city centre on the eastern approach to the main station. This is intended primarily to eliminate a series of level crossings, but TCDD envisages that

**TCDD plans to redevelop the main stations in Ankara (below) and Eskişehir (inset) to support the expansion of its high speed network.**



Investment has not solely focused on inter-city routes. Following extensive track renewals, an intensive DMU service operates out of Izmir's Basmane station to local towns.



PHOTOS: W.P.D. GELTZ

while local commuter services would be routed through the tunnel, a rebuilt surface alignment would be retained for long-distance trains.

Local roads are being rerouted via a complex series of bridges and underpasses. Within the existing station site itself, a freight terminal and related sidings are being relocated to a dedicated logistics hub at Hasanbey, releasing land for an expanded

station serving 10 tracks and four platforms for high speed services. The rest of the land is being given over to a 700 000 m<sup>2</sup> high-rise retail and entertainment complex and an urban park which includes a zoo.

In the capital, the Limak/Kolin/Cengiz consortium was awarded a 20-year build-operate-transfer concession in November 2012 to develop a dedicated station for high speed

services, adjacent to the existing site. This should release capacity for the future development of a high-capacity suburban network around Ankara, including a 27 km cross-city link serving Esenboga airport; FS Group subsidiary Italferr is undertaking a feasibility study into this eight-station line which is due to conclude this month (RG 3.13 p18). ❏

## Political concerns mount amid graft probe

**SCANDAL:** Given the scale of Turkey's 'Target 2023' investment programme, and the weight which the Erdoğan government has thrown behind it, it is perhaps little surprise that the railway industry has become embroiled in the latest bout of political instability to affect the country in the wake of the high-profile Gezi Park protests in Istanbul last year.

A wide-ranging graft probe by prosecutors in Ankara has, for the time being, been halted after the government suspected it was being orchestrated by its political opponents. Nevertheless, several TCDD officials were reported to have been detained by investigators looking into allegations of contractual irregularities; in early January, TCDD issued a statement refuting 'reports on social media' that Karaman was among them.

The wider political crisis, which broke on December 17 with the arrest of the sons of three government ministers, has also prompted Prime Minister Erdoğan to undertake a sweeping Cabinet reshuffle. Among those to leave their posts was Transport Minister Binali Yıldırım, after 11 years of service.

His successor Lüfti Elvan has been quick to reaffirm the government's commitment



Controversial: construction of the third Bosphorus bridge is already well in hand.

both to the 2023 investment targets and to the liberalisation process, with the first segments of the market opened to competition by the middle of this year (RG 5.13 p76). A graduate of universities in Delaware and Leeds, Elvan is reported to have

a strong understanding of the transport sector and European policy in particular, which should give the industry cause for optimism as it seeks to navigate a plethora of projects through an increasingly volatile political climate. ❏